

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0273

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, PQ

SUBJ: TORRIJOS COMMENTS ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATION

REF: PANAMA 7311, DECEMBER 24, 1974

SUMMARY. FOR SECOND TIME WITHIN A MONTH, GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS PUBLICLY REAFFIRMED HIS COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATION AND HIS EXPECTATION THAT A NEW AGREEMENT WILL BE CONCLUDED IN 1975. IN DOING SO TORRIJOS MADE HIS SHARPEST ATTACK TO DATE ON PANAMANIAN HARDLINERS WHO HAVE INCREASINGLY DEMANDED FULL DISCLOSURE OF THE STATUS OF THE NEGOTIATION AND AN "ALL OR NOTHING" POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS, SPEAKING JANUARY 13 AT SANTIAGO DE VERAGUAS, HAS FOR SECOND TIME WITHIN A MONTH (REFTEL) REAFFIRMED HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATION AND STRESSED THE ESSENTIALITY OF AND HIS COMMITMENT TO STRICT CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE TALKS. THE GENERAL'S REMARKS -- THE HIGHLIGHT OF WHICH FOLLOW -- WERE CLEARLY DIRECTED AT INCREASINGLY VOCAL HARD LINERS.

2. WHILE CAUTIONING THAT HE COULD NOT SAY TOO MUCH - FOR TO DO SO WOULD RISK PANAMA'S FATE WITH RESPECT TO THE NEGOTIATION - TORRIJOS STATED THAT "THIS YEAR WE WILL BE IN A POSITION TO SUBMIT TO THE PEOPLE FOR APPROVAL...A TREATY THAT I GUARANTEE  
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WILL PASS A DETAILED SCRUTINY BY THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY." THE

GENERAL EXPRESSED HIS CONFIDENCE IN PANAMA'S NEGOTIATORS -- "THE INTELLECTUAL ARISTOCRACY OF A GENERATION" -- AND PLEDGED THAT HE WOULD BE THE FIRST TO REJECT ANYTHING THAT WOULD DAMAGE PANAMA'S DIGNITY. WITH REFERENCE TO THE CURRENT ROUND OF TALKS, TORRIJOS REMARKED THAT MORE TOPICS WOULD BE DISCUSSED IN TEN DAYS THAN IN THE LAST SIXTY YEARS.

3. TURNING HIS ATTENTION TO RECENT DEMANDS FROM RIGHT-WING AND EXTREME LEFT GROUPS FOR "OPEN" NEGOTIATION AND A HARD LINE POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE UNITED STATES, TORRIJOS OBSERVED THAT "THOSE WHO ARE AGITATING AND SAYING ALL OR NOTHING ARE ACTUALLY THOSE WHO NEVER OBTAINED ANYTHING AND NOW WANT ALL." REMINDING HIS AUDIENCE THAT HE IS COMMITTED TO A LIBERATION STRUGGLE SHOULD NEGOTIATION FAIL, TORRIJOS NOTED THAT IN THE PAST "THOSE WHO PROMOTE THE EXPLOSIONS... TAKE THEIR AIRPLANE, REACH THE SAFETY OF MIAMI AND THEN RETURN TO SEE WHAT ADVANTAGES THEY CAN OBTAIN FROM THE DEAD IN THE COUNTRY." THIS TIME, SAID TORRIJOS, WE WILL CLOSE THE AIRPORTS "AND HE WHO EXPRESSES HIS OPINION WILL FIGHT." WITH REGARD TO NEGOTIATING CONFIDENTIALITY, TORRIJOS TERMED THE ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO PRESSURE FOR FULL DISCLOSURE AS "ANTI-PANAMANIAN"; THEY KNOW SECRECY IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE TALKS. HALFWAY INFORMATION, HE SAID, IS CRIMINAL, WOULD ONLY

PROVOKE SOCIAL STRESS AND "ACCRUE TO THE BENEFIT OF THE ZONIAN AND THE UNITED STATES." "WE HAVE PLEDGED AND ARE FULFILLING OUR PLEDGE TO MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE CONFIDENTIALITY AS LONG AS IT HAS TO BE MAINTAINED."

4. COMMENT. CONCURRENT WITH RUMORS AND THE APPEARANCE OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES HERE AND IN THE U.S. THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE PROGRESSING WELL, TORRIJOS RECENTLY HAS COME UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM OUT-SPOKEN ULTRA-NATIONALISTS, RADICAL STUDENTS AND CONSERVATIVE OPPONENTS TO REVEAL THE STATUS OF THE NEGOTIATION. HIS REFUSAL TO DO SO HAS IN TURN GENERATED SUSPICIONS AND ALLEGATIONS THAT HIS IS "SELLING OUT" OR COMPROMISING PANAMA'S INTERESTS. THE GENERAL'S SHARP ATTACK ON THE MOTIVES AND COURAGE OF THE HARD LINERS REFLECTS BOTH HIS SENSITIVITY AND CONCERN OVER HIS VULNERABILITY TO SUCH TACTICS. HIS WORDS CLEARLY ATTEMPT TO PLACE OPPONENTS OF COMPROMISE IN ONE BAG LABELED "RIGHT WING" EVEN THOUGH THE MOST SERIOUS CLAMOUR TO DATE HAS

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COME FROM THE RADICAL STUDENT GROUP THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT FRONT (FER). BY IMPLYING THE HARD LINERS ARE ALL ON THE RIGHT, TORRIJOS IS SEEKING TO ISOLATE THE FER FROM THE MAINSTREAM OF THE LEFTIST STUDENT MOVEMENT WHICH HAS UNTIL NOW GENERALLY SUPPORTED HIS CONDUCT OF THE TREATY NEGOTIATION.  
JORDEN

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